

schizophrenia, of people who were interested in Iranian politics, at the same time not really be able to identify in a sociopolitical sense with either group, you remain in limbo in a sense. Yet, in a social gathering on Saturday night, you find yourself with these people. I could be a representative in that sense of a group of people who found themselves -- It was more or less the same situation in Iran. But I learned that later. I learned that later. The same situation. Many people used to go to gatherings and make statements which they did not really believe in, in the sense of being committed to them as a concrete belief. Yet, they thought it's absolutely necessary and essential as a political expression. At the time, you don't think about contradictions or inconsistencies and all that. That's not really an issue when you're involved. The reason it's not an issue is that you don't really see any threat.

Q: When did you meet Yazdi?

Farhang: The first time that I actually met him was when he came to Berkeley several years before the Revolution, but I had spoken to him on the phone. He published a newspaper, Mojahed. Even though it was not a representative of the Mojahedin it had that aura, that implication. If we read Mojahed, it's more religious than political, but religion at the service of politics - not at all religion as an end in itself. I knew of him. We had many common friends. He came from the same background as Chamran did.

I knew that he was a member of Nehzate Azadi and Bazargan and so forth.

My beginning of closer contact with him began when Shari'ati died. Ehsan Shari'ati was coming to University of California in Sacramento to study. He actually was visiting me in Sacramento. I knew him from way back. He was actually living with my sister in Seattle. He finished his high school there, and I was instrumental in bringing him here. From there, he graduated from high school and he wanted to come to California to go to school. Ehsan visited me and he went to San Jose to take part in a student political activity that we heard the news that his father died in Europe. Yazdi decided to go to Europe for the funeral and so forth. It was the beginning of our greater contact that we talked on the phone and I found Ehsan, and Ehsan also went to Europe for his father's funeral.

But my closer personal kind of cooperation, a more concrete kind of cooperation, with Yazdi started when he went to Iraq and, from there, to Paris. I was doing some writing and speaking here during the period, and I'd been in contact with him. I wanted to know what was going on there. I had written a number of articles under a pseudonym that he had redistributed.

Q: This was in what year?

Farhang: This is in November-December of 1978. When the Iraqi government decided to expel Khomeini from Iraq, Yazdi was Khomeini's representative in the sense that many Iranians who

wanted to contribute money, to pay sahm-e imam, as is well-known, they used to do it indirectly so they wouldn't be caught, they would do it through Khomeini's representatives abroad. It was very easy to transfer money to the States or to Europe. He was instrumental in collecting money and sending it to Khomeini. So, there was close cooperation. But I doubt very much if he had actually seen -- Yes, he had seen Khomeini when he went to Lebanon once, and from there to Iraq and met Khomeini. But perhaps he had met him only once.

So, he went to Iraq and helped Khomeini, who did not want to go to Paris at all. Yazdi told me that he did not want to go to Paris and they really did their best to avoid going to Paris, because Khomeini told him that he wished to go to an Islamic country from Iraq. They went to Kuwait and they waited in Kuwait International Airport for several hours. The Kuwaitis were trying to get some word from Iran of whether they should let him stay. Apparently, based on what I have heard, the Shah decided to ask the Kuwaitis not to permit him. So, the only country he could go -- just one other country that he could go -- without needing a visa was France. He went there, thinking that it would be very temporary until he obtained his visa from an Islamic country. Pakistan, for example, he was interested in. But once he went to Paris, the world unraveled in ways that he could not imagine, and the idea of leaving France was completely dismissed.

Q: Now, here was Khomeini in Iraq, and there were these various

activities, mostly students of different persuasions abroad, in Europe and America, and there were certain activities inside Iran. Were you conscious of any sort of a network or organizational structure which tied these together?

Farhang: Absolutely not. In my opinion, it did not exist at all. It did not exist at all. The network, in an organizational sense, was totally absent. Yet, because all of these activities were focused on one person, the Shah, opposition to the Shah, through this spontaneous universal focus, there was solidarity, but not solidarity in the sense of having a strategy or platform or organization. In my opinion, that was one necessary, but not sufficient, condition to create a movement because negativity is not enough, never enough, to create a movement. Inside Iran, it could easily be crushed, for example.

The other necessary condition to make it necessary and sufficient for a movement to sustain itself was a positive identification. Khomeini came to provide that image. The negative side was crystal clear from way back. We perceived the Shah as the personification of evil, as someone who did not have the interests of the Iranian society and people in heart. This was the way he was perceived by a range of political perspectives. Yet, in the absence of the positive image, someone countering him, this oppositional movement could never really be focused and galvanized into a political movement. It was largely sentimental. Student activities largely were politically irrelevant, in my opinion. Until the movement in Iran began to

threaten the regime and be covered by the international media, all the activities I was engaged in, in the area of human rights, we used to be desperate to get a line in a letter to the editor.

Suddenly in 1978, after so many invitations and so many editorials, not because we were changed, simply because -- And it's the same. It's all limited to Iran. So, Khomeini came to provide the positive substance.

Q: At what point? At what point were you conscious that Khomeini was a potential leader?

Farhang: When he went to Paris.

Q: Not before?

Farhang: Not before that. I don't think anybody -- The believers who claim today that they saw him as a leader, in my opinion, are imagining the past. They saw him as the religious leader because they were interested in fatwa in their personal lives. They were interested in a religious guide. And they were very much interested, more than anything else, in presenting religion because the religious movement abroad, as well as in Iran, defined itself in opposition to the left. It saw itself as the rival of the left - not politically, but ideologically. Once challenge facing the Muslim Student Association was to present a progressive fighting image of

religion. In that sense, Khomeini was very useful to them. But it's entirely a different matter to see him as the leader of the country. When it came to non-religious sectors, his usefulness was instrumental - the kind of usefulness that other religious personalities have had throughout our history in organizing popular support in favor of largely anti-foreign interference, anti-imperialist activities, to the extent that they were successful. But only when he went to Paris. In once sense, I see all these things as unfolding spontaneously, the role of accident, far greater than anything else - an accident within the parameters of possibility, if not that. Khomeini's elevation to the position of leadership of the Iranian revolution was facilitated by the coverage he received by the media. We were very much in the mold of flowing with this. Some of us were more prepared because of our background and so forth, but no secular kind of movement tried to relate to Khomeini as their leader. Some tried to use him, and he always shied away from it.

Q: To go back, you said in 1965, you went to Iran for a visit?

Farhang: I went to Iran for a visit. I had completed my undergraduate work. I went to Iran for the first time with a student tour organized partly by government and others. It was based on discounts, I remember. So, I went to Iran that summer. It was a very important summer, in a sense. Maleki's people were more or less openly in their homes. One person that I immediately went to see was Maleki. I remember distinctly. I

was extremely fond of him. I took a small record player for him as a gift and also a bottle of whiskey. I went to his house in Shah Reza Avenue. The first thing he asked me was that he had Richard Cottam's book, Nationalism in Iran, and he wanted a number of pages to be translated, and he asked me to do it, and I did. Then, they had a guest coming from England, Albert Carthy, the Secretary of International Socialists. He was coming to Iran, in a sense, without the knowledge of the government. He was intensely anti-Communist. He was British. He knew Maleki. They invited him to a number of parties, and I was in every one of those parties as an interpreter. Also, Maleki asked me to take him to the city. So, I took Albert Carthy with another student. We tried to show him the absolute worst [chuckles] thing we could find because, at that time, our purpose was to give him a very negative and derogatory image of the Iranian political order. One way of doing that was to show how much they have failed in improving the conditions of it. So, I took him to the worst possible places.

Later on, the government found out. SAVAK found out that he was in Iran. I was in two parties. All the people in one particular party were arrested, but they were arrested one day after I had returned to the United States. It was rumored at the time that one person who was present in both meetings -- The meetings were in the house of Maleki's brother, Reza. And Mohammad Safa -- I knew him through family, as well as his association with Dadashpur and others in Niruy-e Sevvom -- He

and others were accused by the list of guests given to SAVAK. The day after I left Iran they had gone to my house to arrest me.

[end of side one, tape three]

I knew it was serious when, because a year later, when I sent my passport to San Francisco it was not renewed. I wanted to go to Europe. I already had my green card because I was married to an American woman. But that incident, they never returned my passport. They never responded to my inquiries and all that. But it was basically because of participation in these two social gatherings, really -- there were about twenty-five, thirty people each time -- but perhaps also giving Albert Carthy a tour of Tehran, trying to discredit --

Q: So, you didn't return to Iran until when?

Farhang: No. After that, until 1970, I didn't return to Iran. By this time, three or four years passed. Accidentally, I supposed I should apply for the passport again. This time, I wrote to Washington and they said, "Write to San Francisco." I wrote to San Francisco. It was largely in connection with getting a birth certificate for my second son. In order to do that, they needed all this, and I said, "I don't have it." So, I decided to apply for it, and they gave it to me. They gave it to me so, in the summer of 1970, I went back to Iran. There was absolutely no incident, no questioning of any kind.



After the summer of 1970, when I had started teaching, from then on, I went to Iran virtually every year without any problem.

Q: You were active here, though?

Farhang: I was active. But active not, again, in the sense of leading. I was very active in human rights. Whatever I wrote, it was never with my own name. Even toward the very end, I didn't want to do it. Right. I was active. If somebody wanted to report me, I was very well-known, giving speeches and writing and all that. I was active, even though not in association with any particular group - not at all.

Q: Individually, you were?

Farhang: Individually. I had learned more and more. I have to say that my own personal orientation had gradually changed, that I could not really feel completely restricted to Iran. It was during the anti-war movement. I was involved with many American groups. There was this whole movement of international or transnational academic activities that many American students, faculty members, and all that were in. So, I was involved in this.

Q: In the larger sense?

Farhang: In the larger sense. During this period, I did my best to solicit support from this larger group for purposes of defending human [rights] - always with the very specific focus on Iran without anti-regime type of rhetoric at all. I was a member of Amnesty International, and I was very much following the guidelines. I was extremely taken by the way they approached it. People like, for example, Richard Falk or Ramsey Clark or George Volt. I came to know all of these people during this period, trying to get some publicity through them with respect to the human rights situation in Iran or being perceived as being legitimate by other American personalities and so forth. But I went to Iran regularly, and I didn't have any problem.

Q: You weren't in contact with the students or others activists here, like Fatemi or Yazdi or Chamran?

Farhang: Chamran, by this time, was gone. Fatemi had ceased to be active very early, long before this period. In fact, toward the end, he had changed sides and he had become more interested in accommodation and reconciliation. For example, the last demonstrations against the Shah in Washington, he was opposed to it. So, he had changed like many others - not that there was anything particularly different about him.

Chamran left his family and children in the late 1960s, 1967 or 1968, and went to Lebanon. He was teaching there.

Yazdi moved to Texas. Yazdi had also two kinds of activities. Retroactively, one would assume that Yazdi's life

was completely taken by his political activities. Far from it. He was almost a missionary. He was very interested in the American black community in the Houston area, propagating a very liberal version of Islam to these people. As a result of that, I understand he even had some enemies from the more militant black Muslims. He used to be very much interested -- He's also well-versed and very knowledgeable about Qur'anic interpretation. So, he had a gathering of Iranian students who were interested. Texas was a place where a lot of the more religious Iranians went to school. So, his activities were religious, really, in the sense of responding to this thirst for religious identity, and also political on the side. But in terms of time and energy, he was largely devoted to religious activities, per se, to the extent that, outside his academic work.

My contact at this time -- When I started, beginning in the summer of 1970, when I went to Iran, with people who were active in Iran - again, not active in the sense of being a part of any kind of guerrilla movement, but people like Seyyed Javadi, 'Ali Shari'ati, or Karim Lahiji. Again, many of them remnants of the same period, who had become obviously older and all that. Many of these people. So, I knew about them and we met regularly, and we developed, in fact, a new set of relationships during this period. Later on, when Lahiji and Bazargan formed the Human Rights Committee in Iran, then every time I had to make a presentation or write something, I had a reference. These people were my source, my representatives, in a sense, inside Iran.

But, again, there was really no organization.

Later on, we knew that all of these things were based on personal contacts and personal trust of very small groups of people. What I found in the period which influenced me a great deal was a kind of romanticization of the religious activities, including the Mojahedin by secular, social, democratic, liberal types like myself. The reason that we found this area, as we were talking about it earlier, is a lot of these people in Iran distrusted the Tudeh Party completely. Many of them even distrusted the Fada'iyani even though they did not want to say it publicly. They had gained such prestige, people like Golsorkhi and Jazani and so forth. Yet, many of us knew that when we really dig deep, we're going to find the Tudeh Party deep down. We knew that. Yet, in the Mojahedin or the religious people, they were more native, so romanticization of these people, even though I was very critical of any form of religious orientation as a general kind of ideology for a movement, beginning, I would say, in late 1969 in California, and then in 1970, in my trips to Iran, I began to change and have a much more positive, romantic view of religion.

Q: Religion?

Farhang: Not so much, I would, say religion, as such, but the nativity - the nativity of these people, not so much for rituals or a belief system, but the fact that they were representative of something very authentic and native. Bumiyyat was very

attractive only in the context of any alternative. If, for example, in Iran during the period, there was a progressive secular social movement which was not connected to the Marxists-Leninists and the Tudeh Party, and had an independent life of its own, of course people like me would have been delighted to devote whatever time and energy and interest we had to this. But in the absence of this, those who were the potential candidates for such a movement, they all gravitated toward that religious side.

Q: Now, when you went back every summer, how did it look to you? What was happening in the country?

Farhang: The middle-class life was obviously becoming more comfortable, more westernized. As time went on, we felt more comfortable. And our life, to the extent that we had a social life, was with the kind of people that were in and out of the country all the time. Yet, there was a country out there that was very different from middle-class, upper-middle-class life in Tehran. Also during this period, whether it's representative -- I think it was representative -- the need for free expression was not simply connected to restoration of hokumat-e ganuni or any kind of egalitarian notion of social transformation, even though all of these justifications were used. I think the need for political expression was autonomous and an end in itself. For a large sector of the Iranian society, I personally think that even for those who associated and benefited from the regime, who had

important positions, they were, in a sense, alienated as the so-called critical intelligentsia.

I saw a kind of suffocating environment, a kind of one dimensionality, a kind of "montage" orientation, that it's the only way that it could break out of this vicious circle of self-deprecation. I wouldn't really, in those days, call it self-destructive. In a historical, theoretical sense, we could see that eventually, but that's not a political judgment. We really didn't see any political threat to this, but we saw this as a threat to a more interesting, to a qualitatively more challenging, life situation. So, there was an abundance of ground to criticize and to reject the regime in spite of its achievements in the realm of educational and economic development. I would say in that regard, later, one learns that many people within the regime felt the same way.

Q: Were you tempted, at this time, to come and work in Iran?

Farhang: When I finished my work, I had an interview with someone who was recruiting for University of Shiraz. I was very interested. So, I was interviewed. She said, "I will let you know," and I never heard from her. [chuckles]

Q: So, you thought about going back?

Farhang: Oh, not only that. When I was in Iran, I went to see Jalili, who was the editor of this magazine, International

Relations. It was published by Daneshkadeh-e Hoquq. Do you know Jalili?

Q: I know of him.

Farhang: I knew that I had received some copies of the magazine when I was here. This was in 1971. So, I went to the University. I went to see him through the office of the magazine publication. I found him very pleasant, in fact. I said, "I'm very interested in exchanging positions with someone who is teaching here, exchanging a one-year position. I can teach here, and someone could take --" Because we had the system in California. He thought about it and got my name and address and quite a bit of information. I never heard from him. I thought, if nothing came out of this -- Because I knew that there were a lot of people in Iran, teaching in the University, who were really interested in exchanging positions with someone who was teaching in a university in California. There was really no shortage of people who had been graduated from Great Britain or the United States.

So, after that, I didn't make any attempt. But both times, I was very interested and serious. I was only interested in teaching. I had, actually, an offer, when I graduated, from Chase-Manhattan Bank, even though I was in international politics and all that. They needed some public relations men for their banking system in the Middle East. It was a very interesting

kind of thing. They offered me eighteen thousand dollars in 1969 -- it was quite a bit of money -- during the six-month training period. Then, after that, they would raise my salary and, depending on where I go and all that, which would have been, obviously, a lucrative kind of career. But I was totally disinterested in anything else except teaching. I just wanted to remain a permanent student. So, I tried the University of Shiraz and the University of Tehran. Nothing came up.

Q: Toward the end of that period and the beginning of the acceleration of the revolutionary change, you began noticing the acceleration when? In 1977, 1978?

Farhang: These are flashbacks and all that. I would say in the summer of 1978. I personally saw not the demise of the regime, but an inevitable qualitative change in the system, that it cannot go on, this massive politicization. But we didn't know. We didn't. We had no idea because the revolution -- By this time, I had enough knowledge of studies. I was extremely interested in studying these movements in various parts of the world. I taught courses and so forth. It wasn't simply the existence of the movement that could bring about revolutionary victory and so forth, but also the ability of the regime to defend itself or to accommodate. I thought the regime was capable of defending itself, and the regime was capable of accommodating this movement without being structurally transformed, compromising -- I said the regime definitely had



both capacities - suppressing or accommodating it. That's the two ways that, generally, these movements are dealt with.

What was extremely surprising to me was the total incapacity of the regime to do either. That was news. The reason it was news -- First of all, we didn't have information about the capacity of the regime to maintain order or accommodate opposition. That was one. The second thing was that, even for academicians like me very kind of pragmatic and empirically rooted in their thinking and research and writing, we thought in ideological terms with respect to Iran - in ideological terms that, the regime was incapable of engaging in compromise for its fundamental ideological opposition to its critics. There was absolutely no evidence in Iran that they had ever tried to do this.

So, a combination of absence of any information about what is happening inside the regime and the ideological tendency -- When I say "us," it was a lot less, but as it grew. I think the weakness of the regime was a total surprise. I would say that as a student of politics not only to us, but to American observers as well, as you well know. Completely surprised. That's a different subject.

So, it wasn't so much saying that the movement is gaining momentum to become successful but, in the process of gaining momentum, you realize that the target is really targeted a lot more shallow - incapable of confronting it, as you could imagine.

After, I would say, September, 1978, in my mind, the

situation was over. It was simply a matter of time before the collapse. Again, another incredible revelation to me, I had seen some bits and pieces of evidence over the years, but I had never made political sense out of it, in the sense that, for, let's say ten years, I taught in California in an area where there were lots of Iranians - parents of students, all the people who came abroad, friends, relatives, and so forth. I personally never met an Iranian from the General in the Army to vakil, representative to the Majles to a high position in bureaucracy, academicians, bazaris. I never met an Iranian who would say anything which smells of loyalty or a sense of attachment to this political order - all critical. Sometimes, they say, "This particular individual is an exception." Usually, the individual is related to them, "but the system is this and that."

When the regime was threatened by the movement, people who had benefited so much from the regime, all they could think of was pick up their bags and leave the scene, which was completely understandable. I'm not at all using this as any kind of ethical judgment. That's completely beside the point. On that level, there is cross-ideological and cross-class realities. But the fact that they had no trust and no faith in the system as insiders. So, one after another, the ultimate one, which was absolutely mind-blowing to me, was Ansari when he went to settle the oil dispute, he ended up in Kuwait. These were indications that demonstrated to many people -- and we were just among the general population in the world who were interested in seeing the world -- So, that was really the revelation.

What we didn't think during the period was what would take its place. I would say, really, the greatest sin -- I use it metaphorically and not literally -- the greatest failure of the entire Pahlavi period, we were all, the people in it or critics of it, were victimized by this situation, was that Iranians, almost against their own rational interest in many ways and situations, had come to believe that the demise and collapse of this monarchy is necessarily and by definition a good thing. When you reach that point, the idea of an alternative loses its urgency as a political reality. We get rid of this, and we will inevitably make movement toward greater freedom and all that. I think only the regime was responsible for that, only the leaders. The Shah at the top of it then was responsible for creating this atmosphere. I'll never forget someone who was a member of the periods, a representative in Majles from Shiraz, someone who is very successful, who lives in California or London. Once, he told me that anybody -- He said, "I'm not religious or that, but anybody would be better." Coming from him, a high member of the elite -- So, we were all in that category. That doesn't justify the failure of the political movement. It only explains why the failure was so pervasive, why it was so all-encompassing among the various political forces and elements.

Q: In the fall of 1978, when it became apparent to you that things were falling apart, you were teaching?

Farhang: Yes.

Q: Did you then leave teaching?

Farhang: I was desperate to finish. My term was over in mid-December. I had written an article in a magazine in California, Inquiry Magazine, a student [magazine], which was really only an informative article that I thought the information was pretty widely available. I received a call from the magazine that someone from the Defense Department had read this article and "They asked us if we could tell him who the writer is." The Defense Department was interested in that article, an article which had a fascinating kind of history. I had actually written the article four or five months earlier, and the Nation Magazine, which was liberal leftist, was not interested in the article because I presented a picture that here is a coalition of religious and non-religious movement with the potential to bring about significant change in Iran. By the time the article was published, I changed it. It became much more radical. It was published in November. It was actually written at the end of June in 1978. In fact, one of the editors had sent it to Inquiry Magazine, and then they contacted me and said, "Make these changes," and it was published.

I said, "I don't know if I want to talk to the people in the Defense Department." I immediately called Yazdi in Paris. I sent him a copy of the article. I said, "The Defense Department --"

He said, "Well, let me talk to Aqa." [chuckles]

Q: You had already gone through Paris?

Farhang: No. I'm in Sacramento.

Q: But you hadn't gone there at all?

Farhang: No, no - not at all, except in knowing each other and through activities and all that. So, he called me back the next day and said, "Aqa said it's okay. Go and see what they have to say, if they want to." He had read the article. It was translated.

So, I called the magazine back. I said, "Sure, I will talk to them. But not now. I want to wait until December 15 when my school is over. I'm going to go to Paris anyway. On the way to Paris, I will stop in Washington." I couldn't really because it was during the final examinations at the end.

So, I came to Washington and it was the most incredible experience. I went to the Defense Department. There was this room and twelve people were sitting there with yellow pads. [chuckles] For me, it was another seminar. I had never been in contact with government officials in my life. So, I'm speaking of the Iranian situation as if it's a gathering of academicians, but what really was mind-blowing to me was the incapacity of these people to see a movement and evaluate it which doesn't fall into the Cold War framework. All revolutionary movements were